
Wolf Lepenies: *Homo Europaeus Intellectualis* Revisited

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1.

Questions about the intellectual's place and role in society, his tasks and obligations, the status he ascribes to himself and that society ascribes to him have recently become a significant part of the ongoing discourse in the humanities. There are different reasons in different countries for this, but whether in English-speaking countries, in Germany or, especially, in France, questions about the intellectual have been important points of reference in numerous discussions at the end of the 20th century. Lepenies' thinking convincingly shows that the dominating French discourse on the subject requires a significant supplement today, for it depicts merely a part of a larger whole which does not confine itself to France alone. French questions about the intellectual (from the Dreyfus affair at the turn of the 20th century to Sartre to, in turn, *le silence des intellectuels* in the eighties of the last century) do not exhaust the catalogue of all the questions that can and should be asked today; nor do they restrict our account of the issue of the intellectual to the adventure of being seduced by the Marxist (or Stalinist) thinking which started with the October Revolution of 1917 progressing to the middle of the seventies on the part of French writers and philosophers, followed only by their disappointment with and gradual distancing from it after the Algerian war of independence and the events of 1956 (for it is, indeed, possible to see the history of French intellectuals of the 20th century also from such a perspective); furthermore, these questions, heading mainly back through history - and mainly to that of the 20th century France - basically pass in silence the present and the future (see Judt 1992, Jennings 1993).

And that is perhaps the most important difference in a discourse devoted to the intellectual between Germany (and America) on the one hand, and France on the other. The cultural specificity of these countries can here account for a lot: America, with the exception of Dewey in the thirties, seems not to have had great, public intellectuals, nor to have had great

discussions about their social engagement and the responsibility associated with them and deriving right from French history (Kwiek 2003a, Kwiek 1998, Rorty 1998). The socially engaged intellectual like Sartre who not only speaks - but who is listened to as well - does not find a comfortable place in the German tradition (and let us remind ourselves here of Lepenies from *Between Literature and Science: the Rise of Sociology*: "In Germany, writing and reading are traditionally solitary acts, and a literature consciously concerned with affecting society and firmly anchored in it has always been counted superficial and un-German" (Lepenies 1988: 204)). Perhaps that is the reason why melancholic French thinkers seem to go in their discussion backwards, while American and German theorists, to risk for a moment a simple overgeneralization, look forward, past the present towards the future. America is traditionally a "future-oriented country" with its own myths and dreams of the promised land; "the American dream" is not the one from intellectual treatises, being rather a part and parcel of the social world subjected to a hard test no sooner than by the Vietnam war, and most recently by the September the 11th tragedy (Kwiek 2003). Neither Edward Said, nor Paul Bové, Noam Chomsky or Richard Rorty - to name but a few from among those writing most extensively in the USA on the subject of the intellectual at the end of the 20th century - return to the moral dilemmas of past events. They rather put a different question: what is to be done today?

In a similar manner, German thinkers seem to have looked with amazement, at least until it became an international debate, at the fierce French discussions on the political engagement of Martin Heidegger in 1933, which took place at the end of the eighties - regarding the case rather as closed, at least in Germany (Kwiek 1999). The French specificity, on the other hand, seems to consist in asking questions about the present via detours taken with the help of questions asked about the past; hence recent returns to Dreyfus, Benda, Sartre, often just in order to settle current philosophical accounts and wage current philosophical wars (see *Pourquoi* 1991). So, while thinking about the question of the intellectual today, it is important to bear in mind the fact that our discourse about this figure remains in the shadow of a historically based French discourse on the subject, neglecting to a large extent the simultaneously ongoing (not so dramatic, heroic, spectacular!) German and American discourses.

The theme of the "intellectual" plays a key role in Wolf Lepenies' writings; it seems that his work from *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* to *Die Drei Kulturen* to *Aufstieg und Fall der Intellektuellen in Europa* as well as to his inaugural lecture in Collège de France given in 1992 (*La fin de l'utopie et le retour de la mélancolie. Regards sur les intellectuels d'un vieux continent*) and, finally, numerous articles published in recent years can be read right from the perspective of the modern intellectual. In the present text I intend to trace Lepenies' account of the intellectual and to locate it within the opposition that has structured Lepenies' thinking in the recent quarter of a century or so: that of melancholy and utopia. The knot of melancholy-utopia-intellectual is a knot of three inseparable elements in his thought. None of them exists independently in his works: "Melancholy and utopia - it is between these two poles that resides the greatness and misery of European intellectuals" (Lepenies 1992: 20). It is one of the most stimulating, most constant - and fruitful - themes in his work; the one that provides insight into his account of violence and revolution, terror, totalitarianism, as well as today's post-Cold-War world. The pair provides Lepenies with tools to analyse the situation of intellectuals in the West and in the East of Europe after 1989. It turns out today that the pair of melancholy/utopia not only enables one to see the past of intellectuals from a different perspective, but also enables us to take a careful look at their place in today's world, after the - simultaneous, as he stresses - downfall of the two great utopias of modernity: the communist utopia of ends and the capitalist utopia of means. Lepenies shows us in his works that the pair of melancholy/utopia is useful in discussing the role of the intellectuals: the specific melancholy of intellectuals which derives from the inadequacies of the world they live in and which they are not able to change, and their utopia which derives from the inhibition of action and transference of unsatisfied dreams from this world to a better one. The utopia Lepenies writes about derives from intellectuals' melancholy and, at the same time, is a means to cure them from it.

Utopia in Lepenies' account is a product of the representatives of a social class that has lost its public and political significance, or a class that aspires to have such significance knowing that it is (here and now) impossible. Utopia is a shadow of melancholy, its twin. It is born whenever a social activity is blocked and reduced to helpless passivity. When the possibilities of action decrease, reflection grows, but the intellectual-melancholic suffers because he is not able to act - he can only think. "Weltschmerz, melancholy, and hypochondria resulted from the enforced hypertrophy of the realm of reflection, from imposed loss of an ability to exercise real power, and from the consequent pressure to justify one's situation" (Lepenies

1992: 61). The intellectual turns away from the world in which he is unable to act, he retreats from society into himself, suffers from his own fate as well as that of the world itself, trying to express this common fate (like Paul Valéry – who tries to *changer ses douleurs en oeuvre*) and, finally, suffers for what he is left with – which is merely reflection. *Homo europaeus intellectualis*, as Lepenies named him in his lecture given in Collège de France, is not a social scientist attempting to conquer the world in order to understand and to provide prognoses about it, nor is he the scientist or the technician. He is the melancholic, the intellectual who is *chroniquement insatisfait*, who thinks and doubts, and finally retreats from this world in search of a better one, experiencing his powerlessness.

What Lepenies shows in his *Melancholy and Society* is that utopian thinking derives from the lack of satisfaction with the intellectual's social *status quo*. This lack of satisfaction does not in any way lead - nor in its intention is supposed to lead - to action. Utopias, as presented by Lepenies, are not revolutionary manifestos which show the point of departure (the present miserable state of affairs), the point of arrival (the future radiant and happy society) and the ways supposed to lead from the former to the latter. It is already in the case of the first utopia presented by Robert Burton in *Anatomy of Melancholy* from 1621 that Lepenies expresses the idea in a clear manner: Burton "designed his utopia of England because as a poor intellectual he could never hope to put his ideas into practice", and utopians, in general, "would not think and design in such a way if they were able to act" (Lepenies 1992b: 146). The intellectual-melancholic-utopian while producing utopia is a therapist (with respect to himself and his class) rather than a revolutionary. Utopia is born out of melancholy and is a means to fight it. It is supposed to cure its producer rather than the world - to cure him from his chronic lack of satisfaction, unfulfillment of his public and political aspirations, and depravation of dreams of participation in real political power. Utopia does not call for action - "precisely because it is documented in literature, utopian thought is a sign of inhibition of action" (146). Action is impossible, and the intellectual is an unhappy, unfulfilled man of action.

Utopia as a product of the intellectual-melancholic is organised by the notion of order: if in a better world there is no melancholy, then there is also no place in it for boredom: utopia "divides time to the last dot, since it would appear easiest to create new life in order to preserve utopia (Campanella). Free time does not exist in utopia, because there are no empty spaces available to be excluded from the plan. Work as well as leisure time is regimented" (Lepenies 1992b: 91-92). To get rid of melancholy, boredom, *ennui*, the utopian plan must be

all-encompassing and order and boredom must be mutually exclusive. But the crucial point is that the notion of order, plan, and the finite space of possibilities collides with and finally makes impossible the very reflection on it. Utopia of the melancholic-intellectual is born out of reflection about inadequacies of this world but leads to a picture of a better world in which, to quote Lepenies once again, "there is no longer any place for reflection, because everything is 'in order'" (147). When there is no longer any place for reflection, one can speak of paradise (for what might one want to change in an absolutely perfect world?); when there is no longer any place for reflection, though, one can also speak of the hell of totalitarianism (in which any change cannot be even thought of). In utopia, history unexpectedly stops, comes to a standstill and finds its end. Time stops as it is measured by changes. In the new world of utopia - born out of complaints about the inadequacies and imperfections of the present world - nothing else can be changed, or as Lepenies puts it, the space created is "definitive" (148). Utopia has managed to dispel boredom, get rid of melancholy, make hypochondria go - by stopping time and history.

Let us just remind ourselves that the themes of the "end of history" and the "end of thinking" have been present in philosophy at least since Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: together with Hegel as a "judging self-consciousness" and Napoleon as an "acting self-consciousness", history had become completed at the moment of the battle of Jena. Hegel cannot do without Napoleon, and the other way round in this account - it is in Napoleon that Hegel finds his certainty of being a sage (rather than a mere philosopher) who possesses Absolute Knowledge, for it is owing to him that the reality he is describing in *Phenomenology* is definite. The question about man after the end of history - as well as about the intellectual after the end of it - is a key one for Alexandre Kojève, a great commentator of Hegel in France, who exerted a peculiar and long-lasting influence upon the whole generation of French thinkers and writers in the period of, roughly, 1930-1960. Kojève would ask what "post-historical" man is supposed to do if action that negates reality is no longer necessary, being rather irrational as the post-historical world is the world of embodied truth? What about human happiness and human satisfaction? Is not man doomed to suffer from post-historical boredom? What is he supposed to do with his "unemployed negativity" – the *négativité sans emploi* of Georges Bataille, still another reader of Hegel - and whom is about to be the intellectual, the bearer of this jobless negativity after the end of history (Kwiek 1997, Kwiek 1999)? What happens with the negativity of someone who, all of a sudden, has nothing more to do or, to ask a more fundamental question, and following the path indicated in Lepenies' of

the impossibility of reflection in utopia the moment history comes to a standstill: when everything is finally known, and when society is finally perfect, what will the intellectual be able to do and will be able to know? (What will happen with the whole tradition dating back to Ancient philosophy according to which the essence of being human is knowing?) What will he be able to write if writing is associated with the ongoing - changeable, never-ending, unpredictable - history which is about to end? Lepenies' answer is unambiguous on this point: with the ban on melancholy in the society of the future, there will be no longer any place available for reflection, or for the intellectual for that matter. Hegel's questions (am I not God if I have possessed Absolute Knowledge and have become the first Sage?) that have haunted French twentieth-century thought from Kojève, Bataille, Blanchot to Denis Hollier, find in Wolf Lepenies their explicit answer. The following could be said: utopia as a product of the melancholic-intellectual is a world of which he is no longer a part. The perfect world does not need people whose task consists in looking for its imperfections (for "it is certainly true that intellectuals can best fulfil their mission as heretics and as critics, as deviants and as oppositionals", Lepenies adds elsewhere (Lepenies 1991: 914)). None of the social roles enumerated by him above is needed in the world of utopia; furthermore, each of them can easily become dangerous there. "Dans l'utopie, la mélancolie est strictement interdite"... The interdiction existing in literary utopias is in fact transformed in societies claiming to be the realisation of utopias into the "duty of imposing happiness" - with the help of violence, if need be. Happiness, joyfulness, youthfulness are all characteristics of utopias realised so far, like faith, in making new man. The new man in new society has to be happy. He is not entitled to express in public his unhappiness, his melancholy or lack of satisfaction. He is not allowed to discuss, think, or write.

In the suggested opposition between *die klagende Klasse* and *die Menschen guten Gewissens* (or as he puts it elsewhere *l'espèce qui se plainte* and *les hommes de bonne conscience* (Lepenies 1992a: 17; 1992: 18)), Lepenies goes beyond the traditional opposition of the "two cultures" put forward by C.P. Snow. He shows that the two poles: melancholy and utopia, do not affect social scientists, e.g. sociologists. Sociology is precisely the "third culture" born out of the impossibility of becoming a "social" version of natural sciences on the one hand, and the impossibility of choosing the option of literature in describing social world on the other. The division Lepenies has in mind does not come between the culture of humanists and men of letters on the one hand, and that of natural scientists on the other. The whole book entitled *Die drei Kulturen* (and translated into English as *Between Literature and science: the Rise of*

Sociology) is devoted to the contest between the men of letters on the one hand and the social scientists on the other in claiming to offer the key orientation for modern civilisation, to constitute the guide to living appropriate to industrial society as well as to the very status of knowledge about industrial society that has been taking place from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. No longer is the dilemma of choosing between the natural sciences and the humanities, that old contest between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, at stake; the point of Lepenies' analyses is the controversy between the literary intelligentsia and that of representatives of the social sciences, which, in turn, refers us to the controversy between the culture of reason and the culture of feelings, Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment (see also Lepenies 1999) (or, on a different plane, the dangers of a scienticisation or literaturisation of sociology). The tension pervading his works and born between complaining humanists and self-complacent social scientists does not appear in the opposition of the "two cultures". Social science is located beyond the alternative that the intellectuals, i.e. artists and writers, face: melancholy or utopia, being at the same time "par delà la mélancolie et en-deça de l'utopie" (Lepenies 1992: 20). The traditional opposition of "two cultures" requires a significant supplement in the form of a "third culture", the culture of the social sciences, or sociology in particular. Otherwise the history of twentieth-century intellectuals - as well as earlier "intellectuals avant la lettre" - will be incomprehensible.

The intellectual does not act although he wants to. He wants to but he cannot. Deprived of real influence on the exercise of power, he retreats from this world to a better world of reflection. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lepenies says in "The Future of Intellectuals" (Lepenies 1994), the Enlightenment dreams about interpreting and changing the world began to fade when Napoleon had changed the map of Europe. Engineers to carry out technical progress and bureaucrats to manage the masses were needed; there was no longer any place left for an unproductive intellectual elite believing that principles could govern society. As the author comments on this period, "the result was resignation and revolt on the part of intellectuals. They consoled themselves with the idea that their realm was not of this world" (Lepenies 1994: 116). In Lepenies' narrative, basically there is no significant place accorded to the "Dreyfus affair" in France and the birth of the term "intellectual" in France at the very end of the nineteenth century; as opposed to Bernard-Henri Lévy from *Les Aventures de la liberté*, he passes over that particular moment as a less important one than two other events: Diderot's article about the "philosopher" written for his *Encyclopedia* that ascribes modest Enlightenment tasks to the philosopher, and the Russian October Revolution of 1917. The

year 1917 in his account completed 1789 - "the intellectuals had at last changed the world too" (117). Communism and then fascism would promise the fulfilment of an old dream that ideas can become part of reality. The attractive force of communism to intellectuals Lepenies explains by means of its relation to action - after the collapse of fascism "only one ideology of action remained, and it was towards this ideology that the handicapped man of action, the intellectual, directed himself, whether he agreed with it or not" (117). If one wanted to supplement Lepenies' narrative about the "handicapped man of action" with some details of the French context, then it would be worth pointing out that the fascination communism exerted on French intellectuals was strongly shaken for the first time in 1954 with the advent of events in Algeria. After the manifesto of "121 intellectuals" in connection with the Algerian war, there appeared a new kind of ideology directing intellectuals towards the Third World (see the career of Frantz Fanon). To quote Lévy: "our intellectuals had still not been cured. Certainly, they no longer cared for the Soviet Union or believed in Stalin. But their faith in genuine, authentic revolution, which would put an end to the ills of the West, remained intact" (Levy 1995: 43).

3.

Lepenies' proposals and intuitions go in another direction, though. He is not concerned about the revival of *l'engagement* as presented by Sartre in "What Is Literature?", nor is he concerned about the tasks put forward by Michel Foucault to the French intellectual when he tried to go beyond the Sartrian conception of the intellectual as a writer in his unfinished and unelaborated opposition – *intellectuel universel/intellectuel spécifique* (Stoeckl 1992, Reader 1987). The year 1989 is a key date here; Lepenies on numerous occasions stresses that "1989 has not only happened to the East. It has happened to the West as well" (Lepenies 1995: 3). We shall focus on the consequences it brought about for the constellation of questions about melancholy-utopia-intellectuals. First of all, something happened to melancholy, something happened to utopia, and something happened to the intellectuals, both in the West and in the East of Europe. The dream of a free world of parliamentary democracy became reality in Central and Eastern Europe (as Lepenies wrote in his Italian lectures of 1992, "Die Utopie von gestern schien zur Wirklichkeit von heute geworden" (Lepenies 1992a: 47)). Melancholy caused by the lack of public and political influence gave way to euphoria - and there appeared the phenomenon of "active melancholics", intellectuals who, in a manner unexpected to others as to themselves, after years spent in opposition, gained power. The traditional balance in the constellation of the three elements in question was lost: is it possible to be the intellectual and

to rule at the same time? Is it possible to be simultaneously a man of action and a melancholic? Is it possible to be a utopian and govern society? What is to be done - and thought - when the then traditional concept of the intellectual ceases referring to intellectuals in power? Who are they to become - former intellectuals, former melancholics, former utopians? How is the Central European political "culture of intellectuals" to face the Western European "culture of experts" (for an aspect of education, see (Kwiek 2003))?

Intellectuals in Central Europe were brought to the offices of power by mechanisms which are totally unknown in the West from first-hand experience; to return to Lepenies: "Their fight for human rights, the classic ideal of the modern European intellectual, has endowed the intellectuals of east and central Europe with certain unalienable rights and with a degree of political credibility which no intellectual in the West has been able to acquire. They also display ... a fresh emotional enthusiasm which has been absent from the discussions of Western intellectuals for a long time". Neither their political nor economic experience brought them to power - it was due to their "artistic sincerity" and "moral probity" that they gained it (Lepenies 1991: 915, 916). Lepenies' fascination with intellectuals from behind the former Iron Curtain is a function of his disappointment with the West. The moment of measurement of their place and role in the two parts of Europe seems to be crucial here. From this measuring operation, the former come as victors. Linnaeus' description: *levis, argutus, inventor* - versatile, shrewd, inventive - with respect to *homo europaeus*, the highest form of *homo sapiens*, fits European intellectuals from the East best. In 1989 there returns to Europe the hero who disappeared as a species in the 20th century and who was to never come back. Between the social role played by and social recognition ascribed to the intellectual in the two parts of Europe, there arises an asymmetry. The contrast in question is best shown in the following sentence: "The fight for human rights must be a concern for intellectuals; the adjustment of the value-added tax is none of their business" (Lepenies 1991: 911, 914).

Lepenies in his studies referred to extremely important events whose status nevertheless may turn out to be merely ephemeral. No matter what happens - of which the author of *Aufstieg und Fall der Intellektuellen in Europa* is perfectly aware and of which he writes - the end of the twentieth century witnessed a heroic comeback of a hero who, as a part of society rather than a solitary figure, was born a hundred years ago in France and labelled himself *l'intellectuel*. Lepenies says that "at the end of the century we are realising, with the fall of the communist regimes in eastern Europe, a rehabilitation of the intellectual. We are watching his

heroic comeback to the political stage" (917). And it is precisely in such a situation, under such circumstances, that intellectuals, forced by historical developments, are entitled to break the rule given by Kant and taken from Bacon: *de nobis ipsis silemus*, let us keep silence about ourselves. The year 1989 once again gave an impetus to return to a reflection on the political and public role of the intellectual. For they played an important role in the events of that year.

The events of 1989 (as well as earlier and later developments) seem not to have found a conceptual elaboration and not to have led to theoretical repercussions in the discourse devoted to the intellectual. Perhaps the greatest influence these events have exerted is on two philosophers-sociologists: Zygmunt Bauman and Wolf Lepenies, both for different reasons closely connected with Central Europe. No matter whether one reads such collective volumes in the English speaking world as *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics or Knowledge and Power. The Changing Role of European Intellectuals* or *Intellectuals and Public Life*, or finally such French discussions about intellectuals as books written by Bernard-Henri Lévy, Pascal Ory or Jean-Francois Sirinelli, the references to the events of 1989 and to the "return of the hero" are invisible in the west (Ory 1990, Sirinelli 1990). Lévy, for instance, notes in passing merely the following: "In Tienanmen Square, in Prague, and at the Berlin Wall, we looked for signs of an epoch drawing to a close, an epoch in which intellectuals had perhaps enjoyed their greatest influence" (Lévy 1995: 7). And it was right there that the "asymmetry" Lepenies has in mind started to be visible. The theme in question was never elaborated on by the thinkers in question.

What are the specific types of intellectuals that Lepenies can see in Central Europe? First, "active melancholics" and second, "non-profit intellectuals" (Lepenies 1992: 26; 1995: 14). Both types can be encountered only in this part of the world. "Active melancholics" are the intellectuals who after 1989 took power in the post-communist countries (to a varying degree and for a varying period of time, let us remind ourselves); they are such "moralists" already referred to in this text who, being actors, dramatists, philosophers, poets, film directors, artists, musicians, "retained a measure of moral credibility, dignity and ability to inspire the young" (Lepenies 1991: 915), and who participated in opposition movements and then in successful revolutions. "Non-profit intellectuals", a species extinct in the West for a long time, in the mental changes that Europe awaits can play a crucial role in science (just like, in Lepenies' view, "competent rebels" can play such a role in the economy and "cosmopolitan patriots" can play it in democracy). The key question about the "mentality gap" existing

between the East and the West, with respect to three of the most important domains: science (culture), economics, democracy (Lepenies 1995: 2), shows the place of culture as the most significant in the ongoing transformation. While, according to Lepenies, in the economy and politics the East merely joins the West (i.e. a free market replaces central planning and parliamentary democracy replaces one-party dictatorship), in the sphere of culture the East can meet the West. Let us listen carefully to the following quotation: "I wish to argue that this [cultural system of our societies - MK] is an area where we in the West should take the recent historical developments on our continent as a most welcome opportunity to *learn from each other* instead of simply using it as a pretext to *teach others* " (1994a: 3).

This possibility of learning from each other (Lepenies 2001) - in the domain of culture, without any experiments of looking for a "third road" in the economy or in politics - would allow one to retain the diversity of cultural orientations which traditionally formed the richness of Europe. Lepenies' conclusions are far-reaching. If 1989 "has happened to the West as well", to remind ourselves of his fundamental conviction, then the West should try to make use of the lessons given by history. The culture of experts showed its limitations because nobody expected such a possibility: "the defeat of communism is thus much less a reason for triumph than for modesty - for all of us" (Lepenies 1995: 4). The error of the Western political culture of experts consists, in Lepenies' view, in cherishing the illusion of a final victory, as if forgetting about the failure of the utopian convictions of this culture which accompanied the end of the socialist utopia. For capitalism is a utopia of means, not being a utopia of utopian ends. The point was put explicitly in a Paris lecture when he said that "capitalism since its origins has been supported by the conviction that the progress of science and technology constitutes an infallible means to transform the entire world into a vast universal civil society. This illusion has to be renounced today" (Lepenies 1992: 27). The end of the utopia of ends influenced the end of the belief in an irresistible progress of science and technology. Not to take the connection between the two utopias into consideration is both dangerous and myopic.

It is only from such a perspective that the following theme can be looked at: Lepenies belief in the necessity of connecting the Europe of thought and the Europe of politics, cultural elites and political ones. If culture and the world of thought are to go hand in hand with today's transformations in the East and in the West, then the crucial figure is the intellectual traced in the present text all the time. Hence, studying "the relative advantages of backwardness" (Lepenies 1995: 13) in the East, Lepenies concludes that the experiences that the figure of the

"non-profit intellectual" brings about can help in a self-analysis of Western intellectuals today. To show the idea in a nutshell, let us quote two sentences from two texts: "we should even take his example as a chance for changing some of our own intellectual attitudes" and "he will do something we badly need: he will teach us differences" (Lepenies 1994a: 13; 1995a: 9). When a narrow culture of experts fails, then it is necessary to return - in a critical manner - to the tradition of the Enlightenment and its "philosophe". It turns out once again that the ethos of the Enlightenment intellectuals is revived with the help of Central European intellectuals, while the history of modern intellectuals is the history of their own overestimation of themselves - Diderot's "philosophe" returned to the European stage, with the propriety, personal courage, commitment to civil society and unshakable belief in the possibilities of reason in making the social world better, all of which characteristics are being exhibited precisely by "the intellectuals who came to power in the post-communist societies of Eastern Europe" (Lepenies 1994: 112).

The lost ethos of personal courage and intellectual modesty (rather than self-complacency) was what was found in 1989 according to Lepenies. And if he writes about the relative advantages of backwardness and about learning from each other, then he surely means the potential cultural gains that can be provided by the clash of the culture of cynical experts and that of sentimental moralists. If culture is to fulfil its fundamental tasks - and perhaps the most important is the shift in mentalities - then the Enlightenment intellectual has to come to the stage once again in the manner he did in Eastern Europe. Have Lepenies' dreams about the spiritual uplifting of Western Europe due to the events of 1989 come true? No, they have not, for in his view the West has not thought over its victory, has not paused for a while to reflect on itself: "we were unwilling to draw the consequences of 1989 with respect to a change of our mentalities. Because everything was changing in the East, we were convinced that everything could stay the same as ever in the West" (Lepenies 1995b: 8).

4.

Thus, the key task for the intellectual could be described in the following manner: although the time of utopia is over (note the title theme of *la fin de l'utopie* in a Collège de France lecture), the intellectual is not entitled to look for his shelter once again in melancholy (the title theme of *le retour de la mélancolie*). The best example can be taken from those "active melancholics" of Central and Eastern Europe who help in rehabilitating the figure of the intellectual and bring to mind the Enlightenment ethos. Denis Diderot can become a founding

father figure in a return to the Enlightenment in thinking about the intellectual: he not only warned against an overestimation of the role of reason but also of his own role. As Lepenies describes him, "his intellectual does not live in an ivory tower, and his daily life is not one of exile. Because he knows that humankind can live only in society, he aims to develop fully his own sociability, to make himself useful and pleasing to his neighbours. Civil society is just as commendable for him as an earthly divinity: he knows its principles better than anyone else and sees in its perfection his highest aim" (Lepenies 1994: 112). The question about the knot of melancholy-utopia-intellectual finds here its answer for today: in a world without utopia, the intellectual cannot fall back into melancholy and he should turn to the tradition of (non-Eurocentric) Enlightenment in his search for an ideal of social commitment. For the first time in the twentieth century, let us add, the intellectual has a chance to go beyond the charmed circle of melancholy/utopia. It is for the first time that he is not seduced by the "ideology of action" – which previously turned out to be so disastrous for several generations of writers, philosophers, and artists engaged in a revolutionary changing of the course of the world.

Lepenies tries to return the intellectual to the tradition of a non-overestimation of his own possibilities - his role, status, and place in society - but, at the same time, introduces culture to a crucial place in the transformations occurring in the world. Minimal changes have suggested that the economy and politics do not suffice in the face of the challenge confronting the form of the utopia-free world: culture, science and the arts are to return to an essential place in social life. The question is whether Lepenies does not excessively heroicise "active melancholics" – the intellectuals of the East excessively celebrate the political "culture of moralists", and excessively admire "non-profit intellectuals" as potentially example-giving figures? Obviously, his discussions do have necessary restrictions and quantifiers, but, it seems, he needs the figures painted the way he paints them to draw a contrast with the situation of the intellectual in the West. The more colourful the Central European post-communist world is, the more powerful the contrast he wants to focus his attention on is. And he is appealing to a Western world, so the contrast in question plays a pedagogical, so to speak, role. One could say that both elements of the opposition are "ideal types", never encountered in reality in the long run. But although the reality prompts us with an answer that there is less and less "non-profit intellectuals" in the rapidly commercialising world of culture and the arts, that moralists who had led revolutions and headed opposition movements were long ago deprived of power in democratic elections in favour of cold experts (who are often far away from what Lepenies referred to in Collège de France as *probité morale* and

engagement courageux en faveur des droits de l'homme, to say the least), and that the "fresh emotional enthusiasm" from debates and discussions of the years following 1989 have long gone - just to stick to Polish grounds - nevertheless the human type shown by Lepenies is extremely stimulating. Was it the case and were the people around actually like that? How has the East changed until today, and what will be the direction of these changes in the long run? How about the idea that we here take the economy, and democracy into account - and learn differences from each other? Are we here becoming a "poorer West", desperately trying to make up for lost decades (Kwiek 2003)? Lepenies is one of few thinkers in the West who clearly sees these questions and tries to expose them, inspiring both the sides in question. In the fervour of ideological controversies about the "end of history", philosophical debates about the "death of the intellectual" and sociological discussions about the "collapse of communism", Lepenies' discourse about the intellectual from the perspective of melancholy and utopia and his attempt to make us return to the tradition of the Enlightenment philosopher sound very interesting indeed.

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